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## 3. Lahontan Log: Lake Lenore and Grimes Lake

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# *Lahontan Log*

## *Lake Lenore and Grimes Lake*

**Paul Ford**  
**A Wenatchee Fly Fisher**  
**Number 3 in a series**





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### *Lake Lenore—a snippet from the north end*

**M**assive striated gray basalt cliffs, etched like a giant's fortress wall loom hundreds of feet above the long alkaline lake enfolded in its sere, desert-scrub valley. This is Lahontan country—Lake Lenore in eastern Washington, far from the remote rain-drenched Alaska coastal canyon where I fly-fished steelhead over the Easter holiday only a week ago. I am here this chill, cloudless morning because in April, Lahontan cutthroat trout always come up on the shallows and I always come to meet them. It is a ritual of my life. Until this year, I had not missed a Good Friday on the lake since Nevada stockfish were planted in alkalinity where no other trout could survive. But my excuse seems reasonable!

The nature of fishing here has changed so much. Once, this was a place for the artful fly fisher to pursue fish and enjoy solitude. Now, it is most likely to be the source of shoulder-to-shoulder, hooked on hats, and grand entertainment.

The north end State parking area, washed out by torrential rains last year, has been restored with five inch, sharp-edged granite fill—great for the bald tire crowd! Nevertheless, among the cars, pickups and trailer rigs that have preceded me, I see no flat tires—not yet.

Wader-clad folks toting float tubes of every imaginable color—blue, green, red—including one bilious lime-yellow affair, parade the parking area—giving each other sage advice about fly styles, sizes and colors. Of course, no one listens. This is a play without an audience. Belches and farts, probably the result of an early morning breakfast of biscuits and gravy at the Lamplighter Café in Soap Lake, are salutes of applause. None of my friends of these years will fish midst these conditions. Most despise the Lahontan because they consider its fight lethargic. But then, I have few fishing friends now anyway. I prefer to fish alone.

One by one angler's pass through the tall, narrow confines of a cattle guard stile that accesses boulder plugged paths through clutching sage to the sand and muck beach below. Float tubes and cumbersome gear are passed over barbed wire fencing that runs out from the stile. All is proceeding well until one particularly burley chap in full camouflage enters the stile. He twists and turns. Stuck! His face



burns red as frustration and rage overcome him. His complexion begins to purple. Sweat beads drip from his nose. The crowd hoots mercilessly until a group



of guys takes pity and push and shove "Camo man" through the stile. The ordeal is over. Well, not quite. For as he breaks free of imprisonment his fly line catches in the stile's barbed-wire fencing and releases with a "snap" and his backside is lashed with his leader knot. "Ouch"! In khaki camouflage hooded parka and waders, he looks like a duck blind stumbling to some new hilarity.

The fish are in—grand clouds cruising in two feet of slightly off color brownish water churned by south wind and fish in search of an inlet where they might spawn—but an inlet never to be found here. The fish know but they do not know. Some are black silver and faintly pink. Others have donned spawning magenta, and always there are a few albinos—a diverse society. Fishers stand knee deep and none more than five feet apart. More fish swim behind them as before them! Fly lines flash. They are fluorescent green or sunburst yellow or red and there are



drab ivories and grays. Breezes are gentle and so we flail without hooking each other very often—and not an ear is snagged.

Catching fish here is very easy. Indeed it is so easy that many anglers have a tough time believing this rule of thumb. *Cast your fly thirty feet, let it sink and wait—just as if you were fishing a salmon egg or worm. When you see the tip of your line or strike indicator move, set the hook.*

My fly today is a #14 fluorescent orange Chironomid, but it could just as well be one of my orange egg patterns. Patience and keen eyes are important, because the Lahontan's take on small flies is subtle. These big ole three pounders and up must have fantastic eyesight to pick tiny flies off the bottom—but they do and every once in a while a fish will strip a guy's fly line, backing and "bang"—you've just run out of luck.

Up the mucky beach, a grand drama unfolds. Its prelude comes from young guys laughing about last night's poker game and beer bust. They go on about serving summonses and conducting searches on "some poor bastard." They're probably Grant County deputy sheriffs paroled for some fun. Their hoopla is upstaged by a handsome, king-sized Native American wearing beautifully wrought beaver-pelt cowboy hat and expensive new vest. He staggers and bellows. He has stepped into a soft, slippery silted-over hole and falls sideways, thrashing and flailing. He's lost his hat! Now the lawmen have him up and his neoprene waders show bizarre bulges. His hat drifts lazily at half-mast. Hoots and cheers greet him as he marches to the beach, dripping, but silent, sodden beaver-pelt in hand. Well, that's the lake's treachery. You need to watch yourself. I've taken a swim or two myself! Entertainment complete, we return to the fish.

"Behind you," comes a sonorous voice. Someone wants to talk to me. He is duded out in the finest country squire fashion. Five-eight, but very authoritative. "Say, we've been watching you catch fish. We've been here all morning and haven't done a thing. What's the answer?" He introduces himself and gives me an embossed business card that describes him as a man of some financial eminence—a glorified stockbroker. I know I am supposed to be impressed. Being a kindly soul, I give him a small red Chironomid and some advice about patience. "Hell, we've been using these," he says with squint-eyed arrogance. Well, I've done all I can do for him—well almost!

The finance man's young, attractive blonde wife is struggling to get into her float tube. She is a sorry tangle of arms, legs, vest, flippers and fly rod. She needs help, but her husband ignores her. He's busy knotting on the fly I gave him. So I give her a hand and in so-doing notice that her fly doesn't look anything like what attracts these fish.

"Let's have some fun," I think and tie her on a fluorescent orange sparkle egg pattern. "Now just let this rest on the bottom. Do not strip it or move it." Off she goes and soon is into a fish. It's a riot, her first fish hooked from the float tube and



a very big fish at that. Her husband is annoyed and I am wondering if her excitement will result in an over-turned float tube. Eventually the hook pulls out but she immediately hooks another nice cutt that a gracious nearby angler nets for her. And then another! Her husband is furious—flinging his Chironomid and stripping like no Chironomid has ever been stripped!

"What the hell is she doing?" snarls the financier. "When she comes in I want to check out what she's been using," he scowls suspiciously. But this is not to be. For the lady has tail-snagged a very large fish that skims the surface and then is gone with the orange egg. Alas she must come ashore and as she does, the grand interrogator looms over and poses the question. "What were you using?" To which she answers, "Oh I don't really know. Some little red thing. Kinda like you use." She winks at me. The theater is as good as the fishing.





### *Lake Lenore—the south end*

While Lenore's north end provides good fishing if it is not silted-over from rain washouts or beaten brown by heavy south wind, I prefer the far south bay for its sightfishing possibilities. The water is usually very clear over a rock beach and so it is easy to spot fish—though polarized sunglasses are a must. Generally there are few people at the south end. I suppose that's because it's a long walk from the parking area to where we fish. The trek in is across a flatland of foot-sized granite boulders and scab-rock chunks that are major ankle busters. Cattle are abundant as are their contributions of greenhouse gasses to global warming!

Stiff southwest breeze is on the bay this morning. Normally this water is crystal clear, but today it is brushed turquoise. Strangely, the surface riffing makes big cutthroat easier to spot than when there is no wind. The fish appear as long bruised purple-black shadows coasting over gold gravel. Bright sun is a blessing.

My favorite fly here is a short, full-bodied marabou leech with an orange sparkle head and chocolate or black body and wing. A green leech tied bonefish style so that the hook rides upright is also a good pattern. I do not work the fly. Just find your fish, cast to it and let the fly rest with a little twitch when a fish closes on it. A feeding fish may pick it up. But you must be patient and understand that only one in five or even ten fish is a feeder. And when the fish "turn off," nothing you offer will turn them on. So get used to patience.

Fishing this chilly early May morning is good, but the entertainment is even better.

About eleven a well sported out young man appears on the beach and wades to hip depth. He fiddles for while with his tackle and then makes a cast back toward shore and into the south wind. I hear bad words and then, "Damn it anyway, look at that tangle. And on my first cast." After working at his tangle, he tries again and apparently with the same results because I hear, "Why do these things happen to me? What have I done to deserve this? I haven't done anything. I don't understand this."

Nearby there is a junior high school aged boy, chubby as can be in his chest high waders. He is studying pods of fish no more than a rod tip away from him. "Why don't you bite?" he yells at the fish. "I don't see why you don't bite. What's wrong with you? I'm doing everything right aren't I? What's the matter?" His face is bright red with irritation and frustrations.





Casting to a purple shade gliding along the frothy white alkaline dyed beach, I notice a figure wheeling a bike over the scab rock path from the parking lot. As the image clears, it is a salt and pepper bearded older man carrying a fly rod. An aluminum lawn chair is strapped to his back. I wonder if he cycled up from Soap Lake. The codger sets his bike down, erects his chair and plunks it down in a foot of water. He ties on a fly, casts it twenty feet, drops his fat ass into the chair, lights a foul-looking crooked black stogy and proceeds to catch fish while seated. He's talking to himself or to the fish—uttering fish-loving words or cussing uncooperative shadows. He sips from a pint bottle of clear liquid—Soap Lake "Moonshine" or Ephrata "Sunshine"? That stogy stinks. A few nearby anglers grin and nod as if to say, "That ole coot knows what the hell he's doing." A few others want to know, "What's that ole sum bitch using?"

And at least one of us looks up over at striated south bluffs to heaven and prays, "Lord, give me lots more of this." And there is. But one quick incident is enough.

Mary Ann accompanied me to these waters one warm spring morning. Decked out in her very own drab olive waders and red and black wool shirt, carrying her very own fly rod, she stumbles across the scab rock path like a veteran angler. After a bit of rough and tumble casting and a considerable wait, her orange



indicator moves away and then sinks. "Set the hook," I yell. "Set the hook." And she yanks her rod back to create a great bow—all the time screaming, "I've got a big one." The fish is licked before the battle starts. My lovely partner reels and backs up until the purple fish is floundering on the weed-covered gravel shore—a tiny fluorescent Chironomid is caught in its jaw. The poor damned fish never had a chance! The proud lucky lady parades the gravel telling everyone of her success.

I am still listening to her aria as we walk the fence line just before we'll enter the parking space. There is motion in brown bunch grass under the fence. A rattlesnake is making haste away from us. No matter. Ladybug almost leaves her boots in their steps as she successfully puts me between the snake and her. The song of the trout hath ended. A thick burger, juicy with tomato, lettuce and melted cheese is the Lamplighter's lunch special. All is well at Lake Lenore.

### *Grimes Lake—rolls and rattles*

**A**lkali dust three inches deep swirls in choking gray clouds as my pickup plows along a twisting cow path that we call Grimes Lake Road. It has been a dry spring. Had there been recent rains, that alkali would have become sloppy and ice-slippery. Bleached scab rock and sage wasteland, savaged by vengeful weather, is everywhere except for a green marsh strip that drains toward Jamison Lake.

Winters here are brutally cold, spring flash floods tear jagged edges into rocky canyons and ravines, searing summer burns and blanches. And often there is heart-breaking wind in the coulee and above on its basalt cliffs—sometimes so strong that it shreds metal sheeting as if it were paper. Not far from here are remains of a windmill with blades ripped asunder by windblast. Yet amid this vast lonesomeness, clumps of purple and yellow wild flowers are ensigns of hope. And hopes are high this morning.





Today is June the first, opening day of the three-month season. The sharp-stoned, tire eating parking lot is shoehorned with pickups and boat trailers. The approach road over which I have just traveled is festooned with parked vehicles and others are strewn over abutting scrub gullies. A goodly portion of Western Washington has arrived to drag "gear". So I park a quarter mile away and walk back to the parking lot. A miscue at the undeveloped launch site could lead to a pickup lost in the drink. Float tube anglers squeeze into the traffic jam as they make their way to the water. Everyone is good-humored. These folks know that the snarl will be untangled and they will catch fish. This is controlled madness. But the crowd and madness will subside in a few days.

Lahontans thrive in the lake's rich alkalinity. They remain hard-bodied and superbly conditioned throughout the summer because the lake is very deep and the fish have access to cool water at the thermocline. All are beauties, whether blue



and silvery-pink or the mature red-sided spawners. Hooked fish roll into jumps and fight with a ferocity not found in their cousins that dwell in relatively shallow Lake Lenore. Some would argue with me about whether these fish “really do jump.” If the entire body of a fish must be above the water’s surface, then we cannot call what I see a jump—but it’s darned close and certainly mirrors the fighting style of a big brook trout.

I have no intention to launch a craft. My target this morning is the beach a hundred yards up lake of the boat ramp. From that beach I see large fish coasting from lime-green weed cover over patches of weedless golden sand bottom. No one else bothers this water. Boaters and float tubers whisk by to get just as far away from the launch as possible. They are after the invisible--imagined big ones to be found far across the water.

My fluorescent red Chironomid sits on bottom like a wormlet. A cruiser picks it up and starts to swim off as I set the hook too quickly. The fish is gone. I am better off not to see the “take,” because that sight makes me react too quickly. Better to watch for movement in the end of the floating fly line or feel the line tighten. Ah well, I have better luck next time. Larry Brown, the fisheries’ biologist who is responsible for starting and managing this wonderful Lahontan fishery, is watching me from the parking lot and I do my best to put on a good show. That’s enough for this morning. People are beginning to notice me and I want to keep this public secret safe! Time to go.

Only two days have passed since opening day and I know that there will be plenty of traffic at the lake’s parking lot, but I cannot help myself. Just thinking about big fish is a seduction. But there is more to it than that. I love this forlorn place. The seduction is in the attraction.

The parking lot is a bit crowded, but I encounter no jam-up to prevent me from carrying my one-man Achilles red rubber boat to a grass area next to the launch. But “Oh my,” it’s a long tedious row out a very long marshy channel to the lake proper and especially with great surface weed tendrils clutching at my oars and piling at the little boat’s bow. Clearing away the hair-like mush causes me to stop every few minutes. Well, who ever said that fly fishing was an easy life? Stop bitching!

Soon enough I am under mighty rock cliffs colored rust-orange and yellow as if some enormous master painter has cast broad brush-strokes against looming stone faces. A zillion swallows zoom in and out of their gray mud-made cliff apartments. A marmot looks me over and scrambles up the steep basalt outcropping, scattering scree to shatter placid cove water.

This morning big cutts love my green leech. It is tied bonefish style with gold eyes and tossed parallel to the lake’s bank and sunk fifteen feet to lake bottom. Next, I row a hundred feet or more spooling out sinking line and backing as I go. Then I



work the fly back to me—a long slow strip, a couple of short quick strips, STOP, and repeat. Hoping—waiting in silence. No takes. I move the process to twenty feet depth. FISH!

There are always fish along the steep rocky drop off. That is the certainty, but when they will strike is uncertain. The fish that take my fly this morning are big aggressive fighters—beautifully colored and superbly conditioned. They come out of the water in robust rolls—almost jump and lunge away. After fine runs, they require no reviving before being released. Certainly their access to deep water along the thermocline enhances their strength—but so, too, must the food supply. Oxygen and food—and that's enough, especially without heavy fishing pressure.

The fish have turned off now. I have never figured out why they stop feeding for a time and then turn on again—just like slot machines! Anglers fishing cross-lake in shallow water up against the meadow bank and those at the mouth of the weed-infested channel are having no luck. It seems odd that no fly fishers ever fish here where I find such good sport. Boats and float tubers come through occasionally, but they are dragging spoons or flies and they seldom hang around. That's fine. I value solitude.

As morning winds down, I drift a weighted leech on a full medium sinking line. Meanwhile a southwest wind rises, blowing whitecap hard, and I, who have been daydreaming, am pinned into the east bank meadow—rich in verdant growth and very different from the basalt walls of ten minutes ago.

The little red boat is thrust into stunted brush—willows I think—just below a long-abandoned, unpainted brown-clapboard farmstead. Daylight shows through ancient ribs and rafters. “Who lived here?” I wonder for the umpteenth time. “Did they run sheep? This has to have been a lonesome place. Access is through treacherous steep canyon country, down from distant basalt cliffs. Why would anyone come here?”

My thoughts and the silence are shattered. Splashing and crashing in the shoreline bushes and then thrashing in the grass on the bank just above my line of sight startle me. A doe and her almost fully-grown fawn have come to the lake for a mid-morning dip. From twenty yards back in the clump grass, they peer down at me with no fear. Their expression seems to say, “What are you doing on our property? Can't you read the sign? ‘NO TRESPASSING. RATTLESNAKES ON PATROL. OWNERS TAKE NO RESPONSIBILITY FOR LOSS OF LIFE OR LIMB.’”





Rowing back to the parking area is a prolonged wet chore. Wind bucks up against me and flings chop over the red boat's bow to drench my back. Froth from oar-strokes slops into the boat and I have a wet seat. A very large fish inhales my leech and I make a terrible job of removing the barbless hook. Blood flies onto my face, arms and shirt. But my crotch gets the worst of it. What a mess and worse yet, I have to keep the fish. The rule is that an angler may keep one fish; and, if a fish is badly hurt, then the angler must keep it so long as he does not go over the one fish limit.

Fighting that fish has allowed the wind to take me far back to the northeast shore. Rowing the lake's length is hard work and I am not thrilled about the recent blood bath. I do not troll a leech or do anything else to attract fish. I am tired, hot and thirsty. Of course I have left cold drinks at home. Sure, they are in the frig!

Dragging my boat up a grass bank next to the launch, I see two old coots drive their beat up white pickup into the parking lot's center, park it with both doors open and proceed to chat with acquaintances—oblivious to the jam-up they've created—while other anglers are trying to maneuver around them. After last swigs from sixteen ounce Busch beer cans, these clowns walk to the water, toss cigarette butts into the lake, heft a twelve-foot aluminum boat between them and stumble a hundred feet to their clunker. Why they don't back up to the beach and load the



boat, as does everyone else is a mystery. Perhaps the mystery is buried in their beer. Off they go in a cloud of alkaline.



A geezer who has been eyeing my efforts to pack out my boat cackles, "Yer bin huntin' or sumpin'? Looks like you got on the wrong side of a gut shot buck. Did you git him ur did he git you? Hey Charlie, look a what the wind drug in." He is staring at my crotch. Dried russet blood blankets it. There isn't much I can say so I say nothing, tote my boat up and flee north to town. No matter what the cost, I must have some water or soda. I take solace in knowing that next time I come here there will be few anglers here to view whatever calamity engages me—good heavens, a bloody crotch!

Up the hill at Mansfield, the Golden Wheat Café is open and I notice that ratty old white pickup of parking lot fame is sidled up to the curb. Although I could put away one of the café's huge toasted club sandwiches and a gallon of iced tea, I know that too many people would note my bloodied remains. There would be irksome questions and chuckles from those of the white pickup. So it's across the street to Bayless' Market.



Once in the market my walk is awkward because I have both hands held in front of my fly. There are no other customers in the aisles and it's easy to find the plastic pop bottle and line up at the checkout counter. As best I can figure, my bloodied fly is below the counter and invisible to the lady checker. An earnest conversation is taking place between an elderly chap supported by his grocery cart and his adversary at the till.

The shopper pleads, "But she said not to forget the melon. She told me not to come home without the melon." To which the lay checker responds, "But, Mr. Jones, I've told you three times that the melons aren't coming in 'til next Tuesday." Mr. Jones scratches his ear, stares off into space for several moments and offers, "Waaall, I guess, as fur as that goes, I could sleep in your back room, cuz I sure as hell ain't goin home without them melons."

The checker beckons me forward. As I pay for the pop, she gives me a good up and down and wisecracks. "you bin killin' chickens ur sumpin'?" I'm out of there as fast as I can pocket my change.

After opening week festivities, Grimes Lake becomes a lonesome place almost devoid of anglers--a place of basalt towers and soft meadow marsh—and silence unless you listen to nature's tones never silent even in silence.

The lake's shoreline is inhospitable for swimming or beach parties or family gatherings. Clutching surface weeds, mucky alkali or needle sharp rock bottoms and deep shoreline drop-offs below the basalt are not inviting. Neither internal combustion motors nor overnight camping is permitted. Worst of all are the rumors—stories of rattlesnake encounters at the parking lot, along the shoreline and even on the water. Anglers beware!

Today I row my float tube very slowly and barely move my boot fins under the surface film. Morning is too quiet to disturb. I expect silence. But I know better. Silence in nature is mostly a creation of our imagination. We just need the sense to listen. A *plop* followed by a dimple and rings announce a mud hen's hasty departure; my friend, the curious marmot, eyes me as if to say, "It's going to be a hot one, better get your fishing done early." And he skitters up a shale slide, kicking stones into deep water.—*plink, plink, shale on shale*. Redwing blackbirds, their wings ticking scrawny cattails, are busy establishing territories. *Swish, swish* go my oars and *splash* sounds from a misplaced kicker fin. *Whew* comes from high above as a flight of mallards cups wings and falls into a marshy hideaway. Perhaps there is no silence in nature—only what we imagine to be silence because we do not listen. Nature's silence is its music.

Gliding under the first water-side steep rust brushed gray promontory, oars stowed, an olive-green marabou leech hugging bottom, I am waiting, hoping. Certainty is poised against uncertainty. I know the fish are here. This is not just a matter of hope, it is an article of faith. But if and when a fish will strike is



uncertain. There are anglers who use electronic gear to find fish. Their technology is better than my hope, but weaker than my faith. I would not have such gear in my trunk of toys. To do so would be to compromise my faith. This is a lonesome place but there is no place for loneliness where faith abides. And I drift.

*Splash, crash!* A silver-pink blue slab flails surface to announce *fraud*. A fish of several pounds, unmarked by spawning colors, streaks out in a run that plunges deep. Running line scorches a misheld finger. *Damn*, will I every learn? Morning is filled with similar episodes—but no more burned fingers. Then my pals quit and I slip into day dreaming.

Warm sun and still lake move me to drowsiness. A hundred yards off steep craggy shore, all's well in my world—until I become aware of nearby ripples. Turning to search for the source, I spot a snake swimming my way. Where could this creature be headed? Surely it is not trying to swim to the lake's far shore meadow a quarter of a mile distant. At fly rod's length the critter becomes a rattlesnake or so I convince myself! My fly rod flies into action beating the snake from stem to stern. Poor devil is probably as surprised as I am unnerved. It is persistent and I can only imagine what would happen if it were to board my float tube. But the fly rod takes its toll and the snake swims back to the rocky bank and disappears. And I wonder, "What was its business out on the deep lake? Where was it going and for what purpose." I shall report all of this to eager listeners at Wenatchee's Blue Dun Fly shop. Everyone loves to hear "frights" from Grimes.

As I ponder the snake story, a man who has been trolling a spoon on the east side approaches me. He wants to know what fly I have been using. A fair enough question that I answer with a lie. I tell him that a little shrimp pattern works well. He nods as if he knows that already. *Deceitful* you say? Perhaps. But to tell him my secret probably would lead him to tell others and this lonesome place would be lonesome no more. And the thought of lonesome turned loneliness reminds me of a bit of history indelibly etched in my mind.

Above the rock promontories and a few miles east of the lake is the high plateau homesteaded in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century by my wife's maternal and paternal great grandparents and people like them. They were Danes, Norwegians, Germans and English who reclaimed the land from waste—creating six inches of soil in which to grow sparse crops of soft white wheat. For decades the early settlers and their progeny lived in places like St. Andrews and Mansfield and Withrow where they built their national church and a public school and post office/general store and even a Grange Hall. They were people of faith and hope like us fishermen. Sometimes their optimism was rewarded. But more often, dry weather, a hailstorm or some other calamity minimized or destroyed their meager yields. Nevertheless, remnants of some families stayed on like ardent anglers who will not quit—certain that the imagined would become reality; forever hopeful though teased always by the uncertainty of certainty. Some survived the Great Depression. But many lost the land to banks or debt forced cheap sales.



Once thriving towns have disappeared or become shadows of what they were. Now, abandoned buildings, beaten by fearsome winter storms and relentless, blistering summer heat and forever attacked by scouring and searing wind, are bone yard skeletons—waiting, waiting for the final fall. Even though modern technology has greatly improved wheat production yields, most of the people and towns are gone.

Amid the high country waste and marginal wheat lands, there are forsaken remains of early settlers' shelters hidden in copses of cottonwood and oak planted against and wind—perhaps even for meager fuel against heavy winters.



Ted Rice, my wife's cowboy cousin has been showing us around the country that abuts Mary Ann's family's wheat ranch. The large frame of a long-forgotten inn and stagecoach station—on the now lost stage highway from Spokane to Waterville and beyond—is concealed completely by old cottonwoods and parched grasses. At our 4-wheel diesel's approach, doe deer pour from doorways and out



windows. Their great black-circled eyes ask why we are here. After all this land belongs to them.

Across the paved highway from our stagecoach stop, we plunge deep into waste that looks like it was farmed years ago—rocks piled away from where brush, and bramble now thrive over rolling acreage. “Yep”, I think. “Musta been a farm back then.”

Bouncing out of a draw we crest hilltop to find the remains of a shack, guarded by dwarfed oak. Ted says that a couple of “batch” brothers lived here for years and made enough income to pay their food, tobacco and booze bills during their fall and spring trips to Coulee City. I wonder how it was bearable or even possible to survive in this place—and the two “batches” must have gotten to know each other real well! So what do we find?

Two buck deer sit alert, heads up before the “batches” wreck—one a five-point and the other a six. WOW! They are wise senior citizens watching life from a shady rest. Disturbed, they bound away into the scrub. Deer droppings litter the shack’s dirt floor. This dwelling and others like it, scattered over the plateau, are not abandoned and not all that lonesome after all.

As we tramp through brown and sage bunch grass, weeds and bramble, exploring the family’s history, Mary Ann asks cousin Ted if there are any rattlesnakes around. “Ah no,” he grins from beneath his sweat-stained ancient Stetson—his eyes hidden by dark sunglasses he always wears. But I can tell from the wrinkles in his weather-sculpted face that this is going to be a big one.

“Ah no, “ he intones again and cannot hold back a grin. “It’s way too dry here. They’ve all gone to Coulee City for a drink.”

**L**ahontans continue to thrive in the scab land alkaline lakes, but few so-called Wenatchee “real” fly fishers bother with them. That is because these fish will not take a dry fly and most will not jump, though those at Grimes come close to a jump when they roll up on the surface. But I have not found them to be much different in sporting qualities from the Brook Trout I learned to know so well during my New England upbringing.

Local Wenatchee savants rave about the lily pad fishing for brookies in central British Columbia lakes. Perhaps it is the novelty that attracts these Wenatchee boobs. I fished western brookies for ten years and to compare them to Grimes Lake Lahontans is fantasy. I love the heritage of my brookies, but they are not the Lahontan—though they are much the more beautiful fish. Still, they are a char and behave so. Enough!



I love Lahontans—probably as much for the forbidding desert-like country where they live as for the fish. They will come to any sunk fly a rainbow will take. And the country where they live is incredibly desolate if you look at scab land as just scab land. But that land is filled with the secrets and energies of life and death—a cyclical universe, repeating itself—every evolving. But if you value the wild and see beauty in all that *waste*, then that's another story—a compelling and every changing story of fish swimming in the desert.

